United Nations S/PV.7795

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7795th meeting
Wednesday, 26 October 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Churkin	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramirez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/873)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/873)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/873, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: Let me take Council members to East Aleppo this afternoon. In a deep basement, huddled with our children and elderly parents, the stench of urine and the vomit caused by unrelieved fear never leaving our nostrils, waiting for the bunker-busting bomb we know may kill us in this, the only sanctuary left to us, just like the one that took out our neighbours and their house last night; or scrabbling with our bare hands in the street above to reach under concrete rubble, lethal steel reinforcing bars jutting out at us as we hysterically try to reach our young child screaming unseen in the dust and dirt below our feet, choking to catch our breath in the toxic dust and the smell of gas ever ready to ignite and explode over us.

These are people just like us — not sitting around a table in New York but forced into desperate, pitiless suffering, their future wiped out. These are constant, harrowing reports and images of people detained, tortured, forcibly displaced, maimed and executed. Bombings take place in plain sight, night and day, day in and day out. Hospitals are destroyed, doctors killed, schools destroyed and children denied education, water stations destroyed, families cowering in basements. Peoples' lives are destroyed and Syria itself is destroyed. And it is under our collective watch.

And it need not be like this; this is not inevitable. It is not an accident; it is the deliberate actions of one set of powerful human beings on another set of impotent, innocent human beings. Never has the phrase of poet Robert Burns, "man's inhumanity to man", been as apt. It can be stopped, but the Security Council has to choose to make it stop. And I would ask members to remember that the world is not going to think the worse of them for loss of face or power politics. Global leadership is about doing the right thing to stop the draining of the blood of Syrians. Syria is now a country that will soon no longer resemble even the most basic definition of a country. We should all remember that Syria was one of the first signatories of the Charter of the United Nations — "We the peoples".

As the Secretary-General pointed out last week, the Aleppo offensive by Syrian and Russian military forces has been the most sustained and intensive aerial bombardment campaign witnessed since the beginning of the conflict more than half a decade ago. The results in human terms have been horrific. Aleppo has essentially become a kill zone. Since my last briefing to the Council less than a month ago (see S/PV.7780), 400 more people have been killed and nearly 2,000 injured in eastern Aleppo. So many of them — too many of them — were children. Last week, the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that indiscriminate air strikes across the eastern parts of the city by Syrian and Russian forces caused the overwhelming majority of civilian casualties. He stressed that

"these violations constitute war crimes [and] if knowingly committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against civilians, they constitute crimes against humanity".

In amongst this apocalyptic horror in eastern Aleppo, there have been cruel glimmers of hope, but they are too quickly extinguished. Throughout last week, following the welcome announcement of a halt of all Russian and Syrian air strikes on Aleppo, the United Nations, together With the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Syrian non-governmental organizations, immediately

set up plans to urgently evacuate critically injured and sick people, as well as their family members, from eastern Aleppo to places of their choosing. Our brave, tireless humanitarian teams, led by the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Aleppo itself, engaged in long and complex negotiations involving multiple rounds of clarifications on conditions and guarantees.

It is with intense frustration that I note that the evacuations were obstructed by various factors, including delays in receiving the list of patients to be medically evacuated from the very representatives and interlocutors of the people in eastern Aleppo, as well as the Government of Syria's objection to allowing medical and other relief supplies into the eastern side of the city.

Despite these delays, the United Nations was ready to launch our operations on Sunday, 23 October. However, objections by two non-State armed opposition — Ahrar al-Sham and Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki — scuppered these plans. The United Nations made every effort to get assurances from all parties, only for the parties to then fail to agree on each other's conditions about how evacuations should proceed. And then we could not prevail upon the Syrian and Russian authorities to extend their pause. Our teams stayed for another 24 hours and the bombs were dropping within 500 yards of the fighting line before, disappointed and frustrated, they managed to leave Aleppo, with two staff members of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and one from the World Health Organization bravely staying in Aleppo, where they remain today, to try salvage the talks.

And the result? Once again, humanitarian hopes have been smashed by parties who consistently fail to put civilian lives above political and military interests. For example, two children aged 9 and 14 — suffering from heart problems and intestinal disease, respectively — were to be evacuated for urgent medical treatment, but now remain trapped in eastern Aleppo city. These are neither soldiers nor sympathizers nor militants; they are children in urgent need of medical care, and we, the international community, have just failed to reach them. Goodness knows we have tried, but selfish, inhuman interests have trumped the moral and humanitarian imperative.

There will be complaints and accusations about who caused the failure of the medical evacuations, but it was those very complainers and those very accusers who put their own interests above that of the injured and sick, who refused to make reasonable compromises, and who refused to allow anything to be done unless it was their way. And their way was not possible. Yes, they will fingerpoint at the United Nations — the one party in all this that is not to blame — to attempt to divert the blame from the perpetrators and refusers and their hideous calumnies.

Humanitarian needs — the lives of children not even in their teens — cannot be used as political or military bargaining chips, and yet once again parties to this terrible conflict have sought to do exactly that. It is wrong for armed groups to hold to ransom the sick, injured and children of those they cynically claim to fight for. It was wrong for the air strikes to start again when the bombers knew we still had a chance to get the evacuees out.

Not only have the parties to the conflict not had the moral fortitude to allow medical evacuations; the Syrian and Russian forces from air and land could not even demonstrate a willingness to protect what meagre medical facilities still function inside eastern Aleppo. Relentless attacks on health workers and hospitals have left the handful of doctors still alive in eastern Aleppo unable to cope. In fact, fewer than 30 doctors remain in the east of the city, and only six partially functional hospitals are still in service. Only 11 ambulances are currently operative, rendering the collection of injured people from the scenes of attack ever more challenging. For many, it is impossible, so their fate is left unattended. Hospital beds are too few, and essential medicines — including anesthetics, intravenous fluids, vaccines and trauma supplies — are running out. Blankets are in such short supply that body bags are being used for warmth instead.

Let me be clear — eastern Aleppo is besieged by the Syrian Government. No United Nations assistance has entered in nearly four months. Food is so scarce that many people survive on one meal of rice a day, and what is available in local markets is sold at vastly inflated prices. At the same time, civilians are being bombed by Syrian and Russian forces, and if they survive that they will starve tomorrow. The tactics are as obvious as they are intolerable — make life intolerable; make death likely; push people from starvation to despair to surrender; push people to leave on green buses.

The leaflets that have been dropped on eastern Aleppo by Syrian and Russian aircraft operating in that area make the intention chillingly clear. They read: "This is your last hope... Save yourselves. If you do not leave these areas urgently you will be annihilated" And they end by saying: "You know that everyone has given up on you. They left you alone to face your doom and nobody will give you any help". And it is clear that the aircraft that drop the bombs, the generals who give the orders and the politicians who have designed the strategy intend to make good on that horrific promise.

We have seen this happen numerous times already — in Homs, Darayya, Moadamiya, Al-Waer and now in eastern Aleppo. It will be the fate of those hundreds of thousands of people still trapped in besieged locations all across the country. That is not a world we can accept. All parties and their sponsors must put an end to these medieval tactics. All parties and their sponsors must grant us safe humanitarian access — sustained and non-politicized humanitarian and medical access — to all in need throughout the country, to those in Aleppo and the hundreds of thousands of people trapped in the other 17 besieged locations around the country. Despite what those abhorrent leaflets say, we must demonstrate to the Syrian people that we have not given up on them, that they are not left alone to their doom and that they will not be annihilated.

In addition to the air offensive against eastern Aleppo, and despite a brief lull in fighting last week by Russian and Syrian air forces, non-State armed opposition groups continued to fire mortars and other projectiles into civilian neighbourhoods of western Aleppo. In the past few days alone, scores of mortars were fired into Hamdaniya, Zahra'a, Midan and Sulaymaniya. Some landed right next to the Shahba Hotel, forcing occupants, including United Nations staff, to take shelter in bunkered rooms. Five people were reported killed and 41 injured, including three representatives of the Russian Centre for Reconciliation in Aleppo, during the four days of the unilateral pause. All in all throughout October, non-State armed opposition groups fired more than 184 mortars and other projectiles into western Aleppo, reportedly killing at least 100 people, including 17 women and 22 children, and injuring 533 persons.

While the destruction of Aleppo — both east and west — is perhaps the most distressing front in the conflict at present, it is not the only place in which humanitarian needs continue to rise, driven ever higher by the relentless fighting. Hospitals and schools, critical to both the survival and growth of communities already trapped in conflict, continue to be targeted and attacked, thus increasing the humanitarian crisis in those areas. The precise details of what is happening in other parts of Syria have been documented in the Secretary-General's monthly report.

Government facilities have also come under attack. In Hama non-State armed opposition groups reportedly continued to push towards the city, now just mere kilometres away from the city limits. Two suicide bombings targeting a Government checkpoint and the Ba'ath party building in Hama city were reported on 2 October, with multiple casualties.

Each month I have come before the Security Council and presented an ever-worsening record of destruction and atrocity, grimly cataloguing the systematic destruction of a country and its people. While my job is to relay the facts to the Council, I cannot help but be incandescent with rage. Month after month it is worse and worse, and nothing is actually happening to stop the war and the suffering. The Council has been charged with the responsibility for ending this horror. The buck stops with it. This litany of horror must surely shake the Council's moral conscience, as it does around the world. Surely the international community must question the value they genuinely place in humankind, when entire neighbourhoods in one of the world's oldest cities risk annihilation, their residents treated with gross contempt as nothing more than bricks and mortar pounded into dust; when the destruction of hospitals has become the new normal; when more than 100,000 children are trapped in basements with nowhere else to hide.

This is the legacy that parties to the conflict and their supporters leave as of today. We cannot turn back the clock on what has happened, but surely the Council and its members can take some action to prevent the endless repetition of the events that will surely occur if the status quo is maintained. At the very minimum, I call upon all Council members that have operational military assets in Syria to take concrete steps to halt the aerial bombardment of civilian areas in order to deliver on their existing international obligations and, above all, to protect civilians and allow us to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need.

As already announced on 30 September, the Secretary-General established an internal and

independent United Nations board of inquiry into the horrific incident involving a United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent relief operation in Orem Al-Kubra on 19 September. The board will by Lieutenant General Abhijit Guha. He and his team have experience with similar bodies and have expertise in areas relevant to this investigation, including international humanitarian law, humanitarian operations, munitions and explosives. The board started its work earlier this week, and it is expected to deliver its findings in early December. The board's report will be an internal document of the United Nations. However, the Secretary-General intends to make available a summary of the board's findings. I urge all parties concerned to extend their full cooperation to the board.

As I have stated previously, deliberate interference and restrictions by the parties to the conflict, most notably the Syrian Government, continue to prevent the effective delivery of aid. On 19 September, the United Nations submitted its inter-agency convoy plan for the month of October, which included requests to reach some 962,000 people across 29 besieged, hard-to-reach and priority cross-line locations. Based on current procedures, a response was expected around 30 September. The Syrian authorities responded on 7 October, granting full and partial approvals for 25 locations and 63 per cent of the beneficiaries requested by the United Nations, while denying access to four locations. Denied locations included, once again, eastern Aleppo, as well as three areas in rural Damascus. Last week, on 18 October, the November monthly inter-agency convoy plan was submitted to the Syrian authorities. The plan includes 18 requests to reach 904,500 people in need in 25 besieged and hard-to-reach areas. A response is expected tomorrow.

To put things into perspective, last month only six of the 33 requested locations were reached. In August only four inter-agency convoys were deployed as a result of late approvals of the monthly plan, delays in the issuance of facilitation letters, requirements for additional approvals above and beyond the two steps agreed with the Government in April, lack of adherence to agreed protocols at checkpoints and insecurity. For same reasons, this month only five aid convoys have been able to proceed so far: Duma on 19 October, Dar Kabira on 20 October, Moadimiya this past Sunday, Al-Houla on Monday and Al-Waer today.

All in all in the past three months, the United Nations has been unable to deploy the first convoy until the third week of the month. The first cross-line convoy in August deployed only 23 August. The one in September deployed on 19 September. And the one in October deployed on 19 October. That means that no aid reached many of those most in need in besieged and hard-to-reach locations for the first three weeks of each of the past three months. And while airlifts to Qamishly continued these past few weeks, air drops to deir ez-Zor needed to be suspended, as one Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteer was hit by shrapnel from shelling by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant while at the collection site.

Moreover, the removal of lifesaving medicines and medical supplies by the Syrian authorities, such as surgical kits, midwifery kits and emergency kits, has continued unabated. So far this year, between January and September 220 tons of medical supplies were delivered to besieged and hard-to-reach areas as part of inter-agency convoys. But 65 tons of medicines and medical supplies were not. These last few weeks alone the Syrian authorities removed or prevented the loading of nearly six tons of medical supplies, mostly surgical materials, diarrhoeal and midwifery kits, intravenous fluids, anesthetics and various medicines, from inter-agency convoys: to Duma on 19 October, Dar Kabira on 20 October, Moadamiya on 23 October, Al-Waer on 24 September, Zabadani and Madayya on 25 September, and Al-Rastan and Duma — aborted — on 27 and 28 September. Those restrictions are not only violations of international law and Security Council resolutions, they are actions deliberately and cynically designed to inflict more unnecessary suffering on civilians living in besieged and hard-to-reach locations.

Throughout the country nearly 8 million children have lost their parents, their homes and their schools. They have suffered immense emotional and physical trauma. Children in besieged eastern Aleppo were due to resume school in late September. They did not. Instead, shell-shocked children are retrieved from rubble and left writhing in bloody clothes on dirty hospital floors. They are stuck in hideouts. They cannot play, they cannot sleep. That has become the reality for 100,000 children in eastern Aleppo. Across the country, as many know, one in four schools has ceased to function. More than 52,000 teachers have left their jobs. Over 2 million children remain out of school, and another 400,000 are at risk of dropping out as the horrors of this brutal and savage war continue unabated. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian children have become stateless. It

does not matter that many of us are trying to reach them and would reach them if we could; those children who are somehow just surviving, feeling abandoned by the world, abandoned to face their future alone.

What future do these children have — illiterate, orphaned, starved and maimed? What future does a country have when its next generation is a lost generation? These children do not have the luxury of waiting for another Geneva, Vienna or Lausanne agreement to succeed. They need our protection now. What happened to "never again"? What happened to our commitment to protect the most vulnerable, those who face mass atrocities? What happened to the Council's responsibility to act in a timely and decisive manner? There is surely nothing timely nor decisive about the world's approach to Syria thus far. The international community cannot fail the children of Aleppo, as it did in Srebrenica, Cambodia and Rwanda.

There is no question today as to whether the members of the Council know what is going on — we clearly and tragically do. The question today is: What will we do? What steps will we take to ensure that people in dire need get assistance? Humanitarians stand ready to continue to deliver to any and all in need, but that is not enough. Action must be taken, and safe access must be made possible. For that to happen, the violence must be stopped, and it is within our power to stop it. If we do not take action, there will be no Syrian people or Syria to save — that will be the Council's legacy, our generation's shame. It is in our hands today to take the right path and avert the looming irreversible tragedy of our time.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/873) and Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing, even if it leaves us more anguished than before.

Our delegation once again takes the floor in the understanding that it is our responsibility, as elected members of the Security Council, to give our electors, the membership gathered here, our opinion on the issue at hand, even if the situation has not changed much since we last discussed it. People tend to think that a great deal is accomplished in these sorts of deliberations. To save time, I could say that my statement last month (see S/PV.7780) could serve as my statement today, but I do not think that that is the case, because every time we meet the situation is more tragic. Four months ago when we met, I believe it was on the topic of Syria, we recalled the words of the American poet Robert Allen Zimmerman and his well-known lyrics:

> "How many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died?"

The only positive development over the course of those four months is that Mr. Zimmerman, that is Bob Dylan, has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. That is the only good news in that regard.

The scenario is increasingly discouraging. We continue to see a pitched battle in which thousands of defenceless civilians have lost their lives, hostages to a situation where they are neither perpetrators or accomplices. The situation has simply become their reality, controlled by those who manipulate their interests in that part of the world.

The many initiatives for dialogue on Syria have come up against the inability of the Council to defuse the situation. The General Assembly has also held an informal meeting on the subject, and we have seen a New Zealand initiative, with backing from many States, aimed at finding points of convergence in order to improve the situation on the ground in any way possible. We have sought to find a way to have some impact — so that the bombing stops, so that people stop dying unnecessarily.

We will support all of those initiatives since, in the face of impotence, we must do something. It is difficult to keep repeating our speeches, citing principles of international humanitarian law but not enforcing them. It is difficult to keep repeating that hostilities must cease immediately, that civilians must be protected and that the principles of humanitarian law must be respected. A few days ago, a Venezuelan colleague said that the responsibility for the crisis is shared by all members of the Security Council, but certainly it lies more heavily on those who support or finance either of the parties to the conflict. They bear greater responsibility for what is going on — a slaughterhouse.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): Today's briefing highlights once again the horror of the situation in Syria. After nearly six years, the conflict gets even more brutal and shocking. The situation currently unfolding in eastern Aleppo, where the presence of a few hundred terrorists is being used as a pretext for indiscriminate attacks that are bringing misery and death to more than 250,000 civilians, presents a new

and profoundly disturbing low. We need to ask ourselves how the situation has been allowed to get so bad, but more importantly, what are we going to do about it?

Bringing humanitarian relief to the people of Syria remains an urgent priority. New Zealand will continue working with Spain and Egypt as co-leads in the Council's consideration of humanitarian issues in Syria, but it should be clear to everyone that even if, by some miracle, the Syrian Government decided to relent in its wilful obstruction of humanitarian assistance — and we see little hope of that happening — that alone cannot make much of a difference on the ground unless the bombs stop dropping and the cessation of hostilities is restored.

It was that fundamental reality that led New Zealand to push Council members to set aside the recent history of failed efforts and focus on what the Council can now agree to do to help stop the slaughter and make space for humanitarian relief and a return to dialogue. We knew that it would not be easy and that we would get pushback from various quarters. Even so, we considered it our responsibility as a member of the Council to try to find a way for the Council to act. The continued inability of the most powerful members of the Council to effectively address this issue is nothing short of tragic. General Assembly politics are being put ahead of people and, once again, preventing agreement on effective international action.

We are appalled that Russia will not step back from its current assault on eastern Aleppo for long enough to allow the seeds of peace to begin to take root, or use its influence to change the Syrian Government's behaviour. Humanitarian pauses may give some glimmer of hope but, for now, the bombardment of eastern Aleppo and its civilian population has resumed. It is brutal, cruel and indiscriminate. It is fundamentally at odds with international humanitarian law. It must stop. We must also register our deep disappointment that other permanent members declined to engage meaningfully on the key provision in our draft of what effective Council action might look like, other than to insist on language that had already proven unacceptable.

Earlier this week, we had a curious situation in which one side of the debate said that the key paragraph in our draft resolution (S/2016/846) was not acceptable because it would stop all air attacks over Aleppo, and the other side said that it was not acceptable because it would not. Both cannot be right. Yet for now, there is no prospect of navigating through these mutually inconsistent positions.

We understand that a third failed draft resolution in as many weeks would serve no one, and certainly not the people of Syria. But the problem we are looking to address has not gone away, and neither will we. We will continue to push for effective political action to halt the catastrophe that is unfolding, and our draft remains available as a basis for possible future action by the Council. But for any Council action to be effective, the Council has to come together and live up to its responsibilities under the Charter. We know that the divisions on the issue are acute and reflect the sad realities of today's international situation, but while we cannot escape those realities, the Council must be more than an echo chamber of developments elsewhere. We need to at least be willing to try to get past the current divisions and distrust. If we do not, the performance of the Council and its members in addressing the Syrian tragedy will be judged harshly by history.

Sides with influence over the parties on the ground, and those directly involved in the conflict, bear responsibility for the ongoing slaughter. But Council members bear responsibility for how the Council responds, or fails to.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as representative of the Russian Federation.

That means I will have to discuss Mr. O'Brien's statement. My colleagues on the Council may have noticed that Russia tries not to criticize the leadership of the United Nations. We take great pains in our efforts to work with the United Nations humanitarian staff, especially those on the ground. We understand how hard and dangerous their work is and what difficult conditions they often have to operate in Syria, where they are in constant contact with our embassy, which does everything it can to help them to obtain practical results in their humanitarian efforts on Syrian territory. But Mr. O'Brien's statement today compels me to make some critical comments, particularly his supercilious smile when he suggested that United Nations staff are infallible. I do not think there is anything to smile about.

If we needed to be preached to, we would go to church. If we wanted to hear poetry, we would go to a theatre. When we invite United Nations staff, especially senior Secretariat officials, to the Security Council, we expect objective analysis of what has happened,

which is clearly not what we got from Mr. O'Brien. I have various things to say that were not covered in his somewhat verbose statement.

Thanks to the active work of Russian experts, the number of Syrian settlements now included in the ceasefire has increased to 847. Almost 70 opposition groups have said that they will accede to the cessation of hostilities. Negotiations are continuing with the commanders of armed groups in the governorates of Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Quneitra. Russia is providing Syrians with humanitarian assistance in alignment with the Government and social organizations. Our foreign partners have joined our efforts. Many tons of food and medical equipment have been supplied, including with the participation of the Russian reconciliation centre in Hmeymim.

Russia continues to do everything in its power to relieve the situation of the residents of Aleppo, whose eastern districts have been held hostage by armed groups led by the terrorist group Jabhat Al-Nusra. Last week, in response to a United Nations appeal and as a gesture of good will, a decision was made to halt all Russian and Syrian air force flights in the region of Aleppo starting on 18 October at 10 a.m. local time. Planes have been flying no closer to the city than 10 kilometres, and the moratorium on flights is now in its eighth day.

Mr. O'Brien did not have a word to say about the moratorium. His statement implied that the air strikes had not stopped for a single day and might even be continuing as we speak. If he has evidence that any air strikes occurred, let him by all means produce it. In other words, if he disagrees that there have been no air strikes for the past eight days, I ask him to produce it. If he has no such evidence contradicting the fact that there have been no air strikes for eight days, that renders his entire statement dishonest. He spoke of eastern Aleppo as though it were under continual attack from chemical weapons. I would ask him to produce a single fact about this. He should understand that he is not here to tell a brilliant story but to deliver a report on the realities of a situation. He spoke as if the residents of eastern Aleppo were sitting there in the expectation that a chemical weapon might explode over their heads at any moment. Let him produce just one fact in support of that, or leave this kind of storytelling to the sort of novel he might end up writing one day.

For three days, starting on 20 October, a 11-hour humanitarian pause was instituted daily and subsequently extended by a day. However, the situation in Aleppo has been exacerbated by the fact that the long-promised separation of the moderate opposition from Al-Nusra has still not materialized. The American side has not fulfilled its obligation in that regard. The specific explanation given was that it would take seven no-fly days to sort the moderates from the terrorists. The Russian and Syrian moratorium on military flights over Aleppo is now in its eighth day, while the moderates and the terrorists have still not been separated. We hope that the Lausanne-format discussions can provide some movement in that direction.

During the humanitarian pause, an attempt was made to organize the medical evacuation that the United Nations humanitarian staff have constantly claimed to be so essential. Buses and medical vehicles were prepared to transport the sick and wounded. For civilians who wanted to leave the city, six humanitarian corridors were equipped with stations providing hot food and first aid. Additional beds were set up in hospitals in western Aleppo. In order to enable militants to leave the city and travel towards the Turkish border or Idlib unhindered, two corridors were opened in the area of the Castello road and the Souq Al-Hai market. The Syrian army command withdrew its forces at a distance from the exit corridors so that the fighters could safely leave Aleppo and avoid possible provocations.

How have events unfolded since then? Four days later, United Nations representatives suddenly announced that only two people had agreed to leave the city. And then those two apparently changed their minds. So what became of the 200 sick and wounded who we had been assured were in dire need of assistance and for whose sake Russia had been asked to stop the air strikes? Instead of enabling us to conduct a medical evacuation, the illegal armed groups began demanding that painkillers and antibiotics be delivered to eastern Aleppo and that wounded militants get medical help. The Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria — which has lately virtually abandoned the fundamental direction of its work on a political settlement and has of its own volition switched over to a parallel track — played along with this. Frankly, we do not understand who is running the United Nations effort in Syria. Is it Mr. O'Brien or Mr. Egeland? Mr. Egeland gives everyone the impression that it is in fact he who is heading up the humanitarian work in this

crucial area. And the United Nations staff in Syria are in total turmoil.

The armed opposition that is mixed up with the terrorists has blocked the humanitarian corridors and has been directing fire along them. Jihadists have been organizing show executions. Taking advantage of the lull, the insurgents have begun to regroup and prepare for active offensives aimed at breaking through the front line. The Al-Nusra fighters and their associates have rejected Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's offers for a guaranteed exit from Aleppo. As early as 21 October, the field commander of the Harakat Nour Al-Din Al-Zenki, without waiting for the end of the humanitarian pause, announced the beginning of the decisive battle for Aleppo, and a press release issued jointly by representatives of the Syrian National Coalition and the Free Syrian Army attacked the United Nations humanitarian initiative sharply.

The illegal armed groups, along with the local council in Aleppo, have once again demonstrated that they prefer to use residents as bargaining chips and human shields to hide behind. By the way, that obvious fact is never reflected in either the Secretary-General's reports or Mr. O'Brien's briefings. The outside sponsors embedded in groups in eastern Aleppo have been either unable or unwilling to exert a positive influence on the insurgents and convince them to stop shelling, release civilians or leave themselves. Moreover, the groups continue to receive arms and ammunition, including TOW anti-tank missiles and American-produced man-portable air defence systems.

We have to regretfully conclude that the United Nations did not properly think through its operation for transporting the sick and wounded. Its work with the opposition groups and local council in the city was neglected. Nor did the United Nations put the needed pressure on the sponsors of the illegal armed groups to ensure that they cooperated with humanitarian personnel. At the same time, attempts began to shift the blame for the problem onto someone else. Completely unsupported claims were made that the wounded were supposedly afraid to leave eastern Aleppo for fear of some kind of reprisals from the Syrian Government. They began asking us for additional security guarantees for the evacuees, ignoring the fact that they had long ago been given those assurances already.

Yet another real opportunity to normalize the situation in Aleppo has been missed. The deficiencies of the United Nations personnel are disappointing. After asking for Russia's help in implementing their poorly thought-out initiatives, they have been unable to come through on their part of the job when it mattered. That exceedingly unprofessional approach has sometimes cost us dearly as well. On 20 October, three officers from the reconciliation centre in Hmeymim were injured in the course of their duties as they prepared for the medical evacuation. On 24 October, Mr. O'Brien made a statement in which he attempted to distribute responsibility for the failure of the evacuation measures equally between the Aleppo local council, the insurgents and the Government. In that connection, it should be recalled that Damascus had raised objections only regarding the artificial linking of the issues of the medical evacuation and the supply of medicines. In general, the Government has displayed goodwill and constructiveness, and we have been working very productively with it on this.

We are still open to cooperating with United Nations humanitarian agencies on every issue related to assisting those in need. At the same time, we are still awaiting some genuine effort of the opposition and its sponsors, who so far have done nothing but create obstacles, disrupt humanitarian operations and threaten humanitarian personnel. In future, we believe it would be advisable to introduce humanitarian pauses only with firm guarantees from the United Nations as to its readiness for a medical evacuation.

The negative attitude to local pacification on the part of some of our partners and, unfortunately, some United Nations representatives is incomprehensible. It is that practice, of which the end to the blockade of Darayya is a successful example, that will enable us to normalize situations through direct agreements with local residents. However, at the moment the only insurgents being evacuated are irreconcilable militants, mostly from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Nusra, who are not ready to lay down their arms. The peaceful civilians are staying at home.

What forced displacement are we talking about? It appears that someone would like to see the humanitarian situation in the difficult cities remain in limbo. Does somebody want to play along with the insurgents and strengthen their position? That is a two-faced attitude that has nothing to do with caring for people.

Despite the promises of some members of the International Syria Support Group to work with the

terrorists of Ahrar Al-Sham, the Shiite enclaves of Al-Fu'ah and Kafraya are still on the list of the most problematic areas. We have not succeeded in getting Turkey to open the Nusaybin-Qamishli border crossing, as a result of which assistance to Hasakah province has had to be supplied by air.

In discussing the humanitarian situation in Syria, we cannot fail to mention the effect of the unilateral economic and trade sanctions against Damascus. Their victims are the ordinary Syrians who are suffering under the siege as a result of the continuing deterioration of the country's socioeconomic infrastructure, which was of a very high standard before the start of the conflict.

We cannot agree with the conclusion of the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/873) that it is impossible to make progress on the political track until the cessation of hostilities is restored. That runs counter to Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which includes no such link. A political settlement should be the top priority, for the United Nations Secretariat as well as for the Security Council. The same applies to the fight against terrorism. And our approaches to solving the fundamental issues should be united rather than fluctuating according to the geopolitical mood in one capital or another.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about New Zealand's initiative. We are grateful to the delegation of New Zealand for its attempt to find a position that the members of the Security Council could unite around and that could somehow enable all of us to take a step towards a political settlement in Syria and to relieve the humanitarian situation there. But any such attempt must respond to a fundamental question — how do we continue the fight against terrorism within the parameters it proposes?

In our view, the fundamental positions — which we all agree on; they are affirmed in unanimous Council resolution — are that the terrorists in both Syria and Iraq must be deprived of their safe havens, and that the ceasefire regime should not apply to the terrorist organizations Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIL. That means that whatever ceasefire regimes are instituted, we must always continue to fight the terrorists. We have observed with regret that when such regimes are introduced, the terrorists, as well as a number of organizations that cooperate with them, are able to regroup, gather strength and re-emerge at a new level of militant activity. If a project could be launched that would enable us to fight the terrorists on a large scale while improving the humanitarian situation and putting us on track for a political settlement, we would all be extremely grateful.

I now resume my functions as President.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I had not intended to speak today. I thought this would be one of the occasions when we would go into closed consultations and talk to one another rather than to the gallery. But I feel compelled, owing to the statement by the Russian representative and the attack on the United Nations, which has been trying in good faith to reach people in desperate need and which I think has not gone far enough in calling out a permanent member of the Security Council. It has been trying around the clock to work with the armed groups, with countries that have attempted to exert influence, and with the Russian Federation, and was never really given notice as to what the Russian Federation's plans were. Russia decides that it is going to have a pause, decides the pause is over and presents faits accomplis to the United Nations and the international community, even though it is the people of the United Nations who are there, vulnerable, on the ground, trying to make deal happen for the sake of the most vulnerable.

I would like to respond with a few comments. I believe that what we just heard with regard to the New Zealand draft resolution (S/2016/846) is that if a draft resolution could be produced that ratifies what the Russian Federation is doing, it would be happy to support it. The representative of New Zealand should bear that in mind. I would like to say — because one of the things that the Under-Secretary-General mentioned was the shelling of western Aleppo out of eastern Aleppo and that was also one of the things that the Ambassador of the Russian Federation went on at some length about — that we condemn the shelling of civilian areas in western Aleppo. It is outrageous. Is Russia prepared to condemn any aerial bombardment of eastern Aleppo? Does Russia believe that all the children who are being killed in eastern Aleppo are themselves members of Al-Qaida? Is that what happens — that you come out of the womb and you are an Al-Qaida member, right from the beginning?

Of course, Russia cannot condemn the shelling and systematic aerial bombardment of eastern Aleppo, because Russia is carrying out that systematic bombardment of eastern Aleppo, and because Russia

has brought to bear in the conflict weapons that even a brutal Syrian regime had never used before — bunker-buster weapons that are designed to hit huddled families, and hospitals that have had to be rebuilt several stories down in basements. They are designed to target people burrowed into the ground. They are not designed for terrorists but to militarily conquer eastern Aleppo by making civilians relent and cry uncle.

What is so remarkable and troubling about the presentation we heard today is that what Russia really wants from the United Nations is credit. Congratulations, Russia, you have stopped using incendiary weapons for a couple of days. Thank you for not using cluster bombs in civilian areas. Thank you for staying the hand of brutality with regard to bunker-buster weapons. No one gets congratulations and credit for not committing war crimes for a day, or a week. That is not how the international system is structured, and nor how it should ever be. If we look for an indicator of Russia's intentions, as we heard from Under-Secretary-General O'Brien, there is the leaflet that Russian and Syrian planes passed out. What is said in the Council sounds so benevolent that one would think Russia is like the Red Cross.

And then there is the leaflet, which is what they dropped into the actual theatre where desperate civilians are living. I will read out from the leaflet, which states,

> "This is your last hope. Save yourselves. If you do not leave these areas immediately, you will be annihilated. We have opened a safe exit passage for you. Make a quick decision. Save yourselves. You know that everyone has given up on you. They have left you alone to face your doom, and help is available from on one."

Would the Russian Ambassador state for the record that Russia had nothing to do with these leaflets, which came out of Russian and Syrian planes? I ask those on the Council who support the Syrian regime if this is a leaflet behind which they would also throw their weight? Russia cannot have it both ways, pretending to care about the well-being of the people in eastern Aleppo, while at the same time threatening to annihilate those who remain in their homes.

The representative of Russia made an announcement with regard to six humanitarian corridors and urged people, including those who were armed, as well as medical evacuation units, to take those corridors. We worked very hard with the United Nations and others to try to use whatever influence we could to make that happen. Here was our challenge. The families of those who needed medical evacuation or, as was said today, "the so-called wounded" — they are not the so-called wounded; they are the wounded by your bombs, Sir — notwithstanding their grave and potentially fatal injuries, were terrified. They were terrified of entrusting their fates to the people who had been bombing their neighbourhoods. That is an unfortunate fact, but it is not a crazy one. How would we have reacted if we had been there and subjected to the siege; if Russia and the Syrian regime had refused to allow food in since 7 July; if a leaflet threatening annihilation had been sent; and if we had been told, "Here are your six corridors. Come trust us. We have a humanitarian objective; we want to help you with your medical issues."

We threw our weight behind it because we were so desperate, as well, to get these people out and we wanted to support the World Health Organization and the United Nations in their on-the-ground tactical efforts. They do not become "so-called wounded" just because they are terrified of ending up like the people in the Caesar photographs. They are wounded, desperate and terrified of being pulverized by the Russian Federation and the Syrian regime.

Today, we have spoken a lot about both sides of Aleppo, but Under-Secertary-General O'Brien also referenced the shelling in Idlib. I would ask the members of the Council who have not already done so — and it is very hard to make oneself do this — to look at the photographs of what happened in Hass today. Look at the kids carrying their backpacks — frozen — as they attempted to go to school before being hit either by the Russian Federation or the Syrian regime. More than a dozen parachute bombs fell on a school today. It is not history. It is not Srebrenica 20 years ago. It is not Rwanda 22 years ago. It is Grozny, but it is today and in eastern Aleppo.

The Ambassador of the Russian Federation said that if we needed to be preached to, we would go to church. Given what is happening, I think that it might be useful if more people went to church.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): You said, Sir, that the United Nations should stick to facts. Today, Stephen O'Brien stuck religiously to facts. The problem for you, Mr. President, is that they are not facts that you like. Let me just repeat three of the facts that I wrote down from Stephen's statement. They are all facts, reality

and in stark contrast to the absurd and surreal fantasy theatre that we are hearing from Russia.

The first fact is that Aleppo has become a kill zone, with 400 people — too many of whom were children — who have been killed since Stephen's latest briefing to the Council (see S/PV.7780). The second fact is that Syrian and Russian forces have not protected medical facilities and have, indeed, deliberately attacked hospitals. The third fact concerns the infamous leaflet, stating "This is your last hope; you will be annihilated". Those are three facts. Everything else that Stephen said aligns with my information and concerns facts, but they are not facts that Russia likes. It is depressing to see the level to which Russia is descending to defend the indefensible.

What needs to happen now to allow humanitarian access? Three things need to happen. Step one requires immediately stopping the bombing — as Stephen mentioned — everywhere: in Idlib, eastern Aleppo and across Syria. Step two requires Russia to use its influence with the Syrian regime so that it cooperates with all those aid agencies seeking to bring aid into Syria. Step three requires allowing genuine, meaningful humanitarian pauses that are long enough and coordinated with the United Nations so that aid can go in and people requiring medical evacuation can get out.

What should we, the Security Council, do about it? I agree very much with almost everything the representative of New Zealand said. Like Gerard, I am appalled that Russia will not step back. I am appalled that Russia used the right to veto a perfectly reasonable and moderate draft resolution. I disagree with Gerard on the point that there is some sort of sense of symmetry between those who are blocking for one reason and those who are blocking for another. There is no symmetry between those of us who called for an end to the bombing and those who say that the bombing must continue. The United Kingdom will support any effort to stop the bombing and any draft resolution that is clear enough that step one has got to be an end to the bombing. We should not try to find the midpoint between the position of stopping and not stopping the bombing. It is not possible to do that, and we should not even want to try.

Finally, the one point on which I do agree with Vitaly concerns fighting terrorism. I believe that we all agree on that. We all want to see terrorism defeated in Syria and everywhere else. That is not what divides us, but that is not the real issue. In our view, there are approximately 200 terrorists from Al-Nusrah in eastern Aleppo. Russia has a slightly different view and says that they number approximately 1,000. Let us take Russia's number of 1,000. That is still only one-hundredth the number of children in eastern Aleppo. There are 100,000 children in eastern Aleppo. If the genuine target of the military action is the 1,000 terrorists, why are the military bombs being used so indiscriminately? Why are bunker-buster bombs, which are designed to take out more than very precise targets, being used? That is an indefensible military strategy in eastern Aleppo. How many of the people in that school in Idlib today were really terrorists? I suspect that the answer is zero.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): As the representative of a country so profoundly attached to the United Nations and its values, I would like to clarify several points.

First, I thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his briefing, his courage and the work that he and his team have carried out. When the credibility of a major Office of the United Nations is called into question in such a way, it must be defended. And that is what I would like to do publicly today in defending the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and paying tribute to the work of all the humanitarian personnel who put their lives on the line every day and night to save others. I think that that deserves the support of the community of nations.

We are all aware that the so-called humanitarian pauses, which are decided upon unilaterally without prior consultation whatsoever, are not a solution. They are welcome, of course, but they are not a panacea. We all know that it is impossible to obtain access authorization in just a few hours to allow for the entry of humanitarian workers and the evacuation of the wounded and their families. Blaming the United Nations for such objective factors is akin to firing at an ambulance, both figuratively and literally, because we know that hospitals and health-care personnel are often the targets of deliberate air strikes. The key to it all is to put an end to the hostilities and, in particular, to the bombing. That is the basis on which we can build. It is therefore urgent to exert maximum political pressure on the regime and its supporters. That was the goal of the recent General Assembly meeting following the

veto by Russia of the draft resolution by put forward by France and Spain.

That pressure must be increased until the tragedy taking place in Aleppo has been brought to an end. We cannot give up on that. I have said it and I will reiterate that Aleppo is to Syria what Sarajevo was to Bosnia and Guernica was to Spain. That means that the situation must be viewed as a large-scale humanitarian tragedy — a black hole that swallows up and destroys all of the values that the United Nations holds dear and a promise that a horrendous tragedy will occur if we fail to act now.

I would also like to make a few brief comments on the issue of terrorism. I have made these comments before in this forum. Not only does Aleppo not help to combat terrorism — an issue which should, in fact, unite the entire international community — but Aleppo also systematically helps to spur radicalization and, by extension, terrorism. I will echo the words of my Minister for Foreign Affairs, who stated in this Chamber (see S/PV.7785) that the battle of Aleppo is a gift to terrorists and those who become the victims of terrorist attacks, like France, pay the price. As far as I and my country are concerned, this is an issue that affects our national security.

My second comment concerns humanitarian aid. I would simply like to point out that we all know — and here too let us call a spade a spade so that we can make some headway — that the Syrian regime and its supporters are responsible for blocking the humanitarian aid. I have already stated that here. It is particularly unfair and completely out of place to blame the United Nations when humanitarian workers are on the front lines attempting to save lives.

Lastly, the international community cannot remain silent on the abuses that are committed daily in Syria. If we and the rest of the world believe in the work of the United Nations and the values that unite us as an Organization, something must be done. If not, we will to bear the collective and individual responsibility for it for a long time to come. In that regard, the High Commissioner for Human Rights did not mince words when he spoke about crimes that have never before been committed, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. He stated that light must be shed on serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Impunity and weakness cannot be an option when we are dealing with a tragedy like that taking place in Aleppo. In that regard, France welcomes the adoption by the Human Rights Council on 21 October of a resolution (A/HRC/RES/S-25/1) demanding that the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to conduct a special independent investigation on events in Aleppo and identify the alleged perpetrators of human rights abuses.

In the same vein, we will pay particular attention to the findings of the internal board of inquiry a, established by the Secretary-General after the bombing of a United Nations-Syria Red Cross aid convoy on 19 September in the north-west of Aleppo, which, I recall, caused the deaths of more than 20 people. To make a long story short, the onus is on the parties to a conflict to protect civilians and ensure humanitarian access and medical care. The protection of humanitarian workers in particular — as provided for by resolution 2286 (2016), on health-care personnel and infrastructure — is vital. We must make a strong appeal for the immediate cessation of attacks on such personnel and infrastructure.

Once again, France calls on the Syrian regime and Russia to put an end to air strikes on Aleppo, and not only for a few hours, and on that basis, along with the rest of us, to commit to building the political transition needed in order to find a genuine political solution to the crisis in Syria. As long as that has not occurred and the tragedy unfolding in Aleppo continues, political pressure must continue and will increase. Like many others, I would like to issue another appeal, which we hope will become louder and be heard and responded to in a tangible manner.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing. The situation in Syria, and in particular in Aleppo, has been escalating and has resulted in a serious humanitarian situation. The international community should work together and take swift action to ease tensions.

China welcomes the recent humanitarian emergency initiative taken by the Russian and Syrian Governments in order to help the United Nations in evacuating the sick and the wounded. However, due to the fact that that initiative did not receive a response from other parties in Syria, the United Nations operation to evacuate the sick and the wounded failed to be implemented. China calls on the parties in Syria to effectively implement the agreement on the cessation of hostilities, work

actively with the United Nations to create the conditions conducive to achieving a ceasefire that would ease the humanitarian situation, and move the process for a political solution forward.

On the question of Syria, the international community must remain committed to a political solution, which is the ultimate way to resolve the current situation. Efforts should be made to encourage the parties in Syria to resolve their disputes through dialogue. Such efforts must be focused in a balanced manner on the four tracks of a ceasefire, political negotiations, humanitarian relief operations and synergies to fight terrorism. China welcomes the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations, Russia and the United States of America in Lausanne and Geneva, and hopes that the parties concerned will soon reach consensus on concrete issues so as to ease tensions, help the parties to resume negotiations and, through a Syrian-led political process, arrive at a settlement that is acceptable to all parties concerned in order to address the root cause of the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The incessant terrorist attacks by terrorists in Syria have seriously hampered the United Nations humanitarian efforts. Efforts to ease the Syrian humanitarian situation must not neglect the fight against terrorism. The international community should strengthen coordination and unify standards and resolutely fight all terrorist groups, as designated by the Council, including the Islamic State, and work together to prevent the breeding and spread of terrorism.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): In the end, there has been a genuine debate among the members of the Security Council, which we commend. In other cases, it has proven impossible to discuss issues as complicated as those we are witnessing in the humanitarian field. Now, not only are we calling into question the United Nations system and the reports being presented, but we also recognize with some concern that the issue of humanitarian aid is being distorted and politicized. But this happens only when it is in the interests of certain permanent members — very influential members — of the Security Council. The humanitarian topic is a complex one that is salient in all the conflicts that we are, unfortunately, seeing take place in the Middle East and Africa: in Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Palestine. However, I believe we have never discussed here, and perhaps will never discuss, the humanitarian topic in Yemen in a debate like this one, or the topic of the humanitarian situation in Iraq, which continues to combat terrorists and continues its advance on Mosul. But we are not going to discuss that here. I am sure that we have not discussed nor will we discuss what the humanitarian consequences were of the foreign intervention in Libya, or of the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip.

In other words, in the Council the humanitarian topic is used in a political way. It is manipulated; it is distorted. And in this specific case it is used to attack the Russian Federation for its active participation in the fight against terrorism in Syria. What is being disregarded here is the complexity of this conflict — its origins are being deliberately ignored. Most of the permanent members of the Security Council, the important permanent members, have been involved in this conflict since it began. They have fuelled this war. They have encouraged it. They have financed it. They trained groups that later become terrorists. And now in all of Syria we are witnessing a tragic situation, where there are deaths of innocent civilians, basically at the hands of terrorism and owing to the dynamics of war.

We think that we should not lose sight of this, because the solution to the humanitarian issue is to end this war. The way to do that is by relaunching talks and political negotiaitons among all the stakeholders, but particularly between the Russian Federation and the United States, in order to reach a negotiated political solution to end this conflict. We cannot continue to stoke this war. We cannot allow the groups that call themselves the moderate opposition to continue to fail to disassociate themselves from terrorist groups. We cannot allow other foreign Powers to continue to arm those groups, and thereby continue to indirectly arm the terrorist groups.

We in the Security Council need clearly to call things what they. We have here a terrible case of manipulation of the humanitarian issue in order to attack Russia. Our position is that we understand that the Government of Syria has a legitimate right to reconquer all its territory and a legitimate right to combat terrorism. Of course, we do not support either the deliberate bombing of civilians nor attacks against civilian infrastructure. We have consistently rejected that in all conflicts. But we understand that the situation in Syria is complex. All of Aleppo — east and west — is involved in the conflict. Almost 1.5 million people live in western Aleppo, while 250,000 live in eastern Aleppo, where

terrorist groups have holed themselves up. Reports of their numbers vary, but this is not about numbers. This is about civilians being used as human shields. The Security Council cannot declare eastern Aleppo as a sanctuary so that terrorist groups can hunker down. Flying in eastern Aleppo are the flags of Da'esh and those of other terrorist groups. Other combatants said to be from the moderate opposition are intermingled and fighting side by side with terrorists against the Syrian Government.

We are therefore discussing here a partial picture of the humanitarian issue. It is a terrible situation, and we could hear thousands of stories about the fates of innocent civilians in this war. This war has to end. The Government of Syria must fully exercise sovereignty over all its territory, and all must fight terrorism together, which is the main enemy of the Syrian people. What would they have us do here in the Council? That there be no military operations in eastern Aleppo? That terrorists be allowed to continue to be holed up in the city? I do not know, but I believe we cannot make any country here responsible for this type of leaflet. This is a war, and a complex situation. But it seems to us that there has been a major effort to establish humanitarian pauses to allow the civilian population to leave Aleppo through the corridors that have been opened up. It has been said here that civilians have returned to the city. But we cannot fail to mention that the terrorist groups have executed civilians who have tried to leave the city. Civilians are being used as human shields — the same thing is being denounced in Mosul. What are we going to do in Mosul? Should we suspend the offensive to recapture the city from the hands of the terrorists?

I would therefore urge the members of the Council — we have heard once again tragic reports. We are also seeing the deliberate use of the humanitarian situation for political ends. We, who have no ability to influence this conflict militarily, call on those that are doing so to abandon propaganda rhetoric and political manipulation and return to the path of dialogue so that, by assuming our responsibilities as an organ of the United Nations, we can present to the world a proposal for a political solution whereby the Syrians themselves can resolve this situation without any further foreign interference. Foreign interference must end. Propagandist rhetoric must end. We should work honeslty to combat terrorism head-on and to find a solution that ends the humanitarian tragedy in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I want to apologize to the representative of Ukraine, who was on the list right after the United Kingdom. But my eye accidentally jumped to France and I gave the floor to the representative of France, which I do not regret. I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor this time and not preventing our delegation from taking the floor today, like you did so skilfully yesterday, using your prerogative as President and showing no respect to my delegation.

I thank Mr. O'Brien very much for his sobering briefing, which once again drew an absolutely horrifying picture of the reality in and around Aleppo. It was a truthful picture, not an imagined one.

I agree with the colleague from New Zealand who said that it is unfortunate that we are not able to come together to stop this tragedy. But I am not ready to accept this collective blame, simply because it is just one delegation — it is your delegation, Mr. President — that is preventing us from doing that. Nor am I ready to accept your attack, Mr. President, on the United Nations, and personally on our own respected colleague from the United Nations, Mr. Stephen O'Brien. He just states the facts, and he is not attacking Russia at all. He is just stating the facts. Your statement in your national capacity, Mr. President, creates an impression that you are living in some sort of parallel world, a kind of twisted treality that is completely opposite to what we see and hear every day, every minute — actually for many months now — from the media, from the ground, from the witnesses, from independent services, from the United Nations sources.

The deteriorating security environment in Syria continues to negatively impact the humanitarian situation. Military activities, air strikes and shellings go unabated on all active fronts of the Syrian battlefield: Aleppo, Idlib, Rif Dimashq, Homs, Hama and so forth. It all results in a further increase in the number of people living under siege, which has now reached, as we have just heard, more than 800,000 civilians in 18 different locations.

It is impossible to comprehend that the Syrian Government continues to bomb its citizens. Just this Monday, at least 10 air strikes by the Al-Assad regime's air force and its allies hit the town of Khan Shaykhun, killing 7 civilians and injuring more than 50, according

to reports from the ground. Six civilians were killed in Russian air strikes in the town of Kafr Takharim on Monday. Two more were killed in the rocket shelling by regime forces in the town of Durin on the Al-Ghab plain. The list goes on as a grim reminder of the reality in Syria.

News reports about the leaflets disseminated by the regime forces in eastern Aleppo is more proof of the Damascus cynicism. I was going to provide a quote, but my colleague from the United States has already done so.

It is dismaying to see that instead of focusing on how to revitalize the nationwide ceasefire, the Russian Federation is moving new types of arms and bomb carriers to bases in closer proximity to Syria. Some of them are moved from the territory of Crimea, which is part of Ukraine and which Russia illegally annexed. The recent deployment of the Russian naval battle group in the vicinity of Syria sends a signal of clear intention to further bolster the bombing campaign there. It can hardly be interpreted as a confidence-building measure or as a signal that the circumstances are conducive to return to the negotiating table.

We again stress the urgent need for the United Nations to look into the alarming reports of the extensive use by Russia of incendiary weapons and other indiscriminate weapons, including bunker-busting bombs. We reiterate that those accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity and those who are behind them should be brought to justice.

Finally, we join the United Nations and our colleagues in calling on all parties to the conflict to immediately provide unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to the people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas across Syria. Providing regular humanitarian breaks and observing human rights are the obligations of all parties to the conflict, not gestures of goodwill that one party agrees to do today and rejects tomorrow in order to gain political dividends. It is not mercy, but a duty.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I would simply like to say that we cannot accept the criticism that we did not follow procedure yesterday. We invited everyone to speak after the end of the discussion, and the Ukrainian delegation should also respect the interests of all delegations that have put their name on the speakers' list to have an opportunity to speak on the agenda item that was discussed yesterday. However, let us focus on the main topic we are discussing today.

Mr. Gimolieca (Angola): We thank under Under-Secretary-General Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his briefing and commend him once again for his tireless efforts to facilitate access for humanitarian agencies and to contribute to reaching a sustainable solution to the humanitarian needs of the millions of civilians in Syria. In the current environment, in which the United Nations and humanitarian agencies are operating in increasingly dangerous and difficult conditions, we must commend all those who keep risking their lives to help the desperate civilians trapped in this horrendous conflict.

In the past few weeks, we have witnessed an intense escalation of fighting, especially in the city of Aleppo, which has resulted in massive destruction of civilian and other essential infrastructure, as well as an overwhelming number of casualties, wounded and displaced people. It is obvious that unless there is progress in bridging the differences between the main stakeholders, in particular on the strategy to combat terrorist groups, the humanitarian and political crises will deepen, with dangerous and unpredictable consequences.

The humanitarian situation must be combined with diplomatic and political efforts towards a final resolution of the conflict. Disagreements among the members of the Council, and in particular between those involved in the conflict, will not bring peace to Syria. Therefore, we reiterate our support to the members of the Security Council that have been trying to galvanize our collective efforts to press for the relaunching of the agreement on the cessation of hostilities and for the establishment of humanitarian corridors in the worst affected areas.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I will try to be brief, because I think much of what needs to be said has already been said.

Japan's position, as the Council knows, is that we supported the draft resolution (S/2016/846) submitted by France and Spain, which called for an immediate cessation of bombing against civilians. That is something that we stand by. The Security Council should stand by the very important principle that indiscriminatory attacks on civilians must stop.

The other factor in this situation is fighting terrorism. We must fight terrorism and we must fight it strongly, but that does not justify indiscriminate attacks on civilians. I think there should be a very wide understanding and agreement on this point.

When the delegation of New Zealand proposed a draft resolution trying to unite the Security Council, we supported that move and felt that it could be a useful way of proceeding. However, as the representative of New Zealand said himself today, the situation does not seem to allow drafting to be a useful thing to do right now. We do need a better, united understanding within the Council in order to adopt a resolution.

Therefore, I once again feel, in listening to the disagreement today, that we really need to go back to the basics — saying no to indiscriminate attacks on civilians and trying to save civilians. Like France, I welcome the cessation of bombing by Russia and Syria, which lasted for a number of hours. However, the problem was that it was unilateral, and a unilateral cessation requires a lot of work to be done by the United Nations in order to make evacuations possible. Right now, I can say only that we must stop the bombing and that a ceasefire should last much longer. We should try to find a way to prevent unilateral action from Russia and Syria. Rather, we should seek an agreed cessation of hostilities.

Again, I call on the countries on the ground to realize that it is not just their strategic or tactical interests that are on the line; it is people's lives that are on the line. I urge all those around the table and all the members of the Security Council to really sit down and think again so that we can perhaps revise the draft resolution proposed by New Zealand and make it useful.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I would to thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing and to start my intervention by expressing our deep gratitude to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the humanitarian partners of the United Nations on the ground in Syria for their bravery and tireless effort in assisting civilians affected by the conflict.

Today's debate on the humanitarian situation in Syria only deepens the Security Council's irreconcilable differences. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy of a doomsday scenario: that nobody will step in to help. That is the character of the tragic and harrowing human drama that we are scripting by projecting alternate realities onto the situation. The Council is too important to be relegated to witness to processes that take place outside of New York. We have before us a draft resolution put forth by New Zealand that aims to solve the humanitarian question in Aleppo. Despite the pronounced readiness to engage by almost everyone, we need walk the talk.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for the clarity of his briefing. Above all, I welcome his commitment and that of his team to the cause of the Syrian people, who are being sorely tried indeed. We believe that the time has come to renew our tribute to humanitarian personnel for the sacrifices that they are willing to make, as well as to the medical staff and others who are devoted to the cause of the Syrian people.

Unfortunately, as we are all aware, the situation continues to deteriorate. Violence has become heightened in many areas, especially in eastern Aleppo, where there are hundreds of civilian victims, including, most unfortunately, many children. That does not take into account the wounded. As has also been pointed out, western Aleppo has unfortunately also been affected. I will not dwell on the figures, which unfortunately speak for themselves about the depth of the ongoing tragedy in Syria. That is why my country wishes to renew its call for a 48-hour humanitarian ceasefire, especially in eastern Aleppo, as called for by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in order to make it possible for the more than 215,000 people under siege to be assisted by humanitarian workers and to conduct the evacuation of the injured and those most vulnerable.

My country emphatically condemns attacks on humanitarian convoys, especially the one against the United Nations-Syrian Red Crescent convoy at Orem Al-Kubra on 19 September, which led to the deaths of almost 20 people. We express our support for the efforts of the Secretary-General to identify those responsible for that tragedy. In the same vein, with regard to the tragic humanitarian situation, we condemn the consistent practice of removing medical supplies and equipment from humanitarian convoys destined for people in urgent need, especially pregnant women.

When it comes to Palestinian refugees, they too are suffering because of the tragedy. My delegation condemns the deaths of four Palestinian refugees at the

Khan Eshieh refugee camp, south of Damascus. Along the same lines, we express our concern regarding the continued security constraints that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East faces in gaining access to the Yarmouk refugee camp. Those constraints also affect the situation of other Palestinian refugees.

Clearly, the question we are all asking is what the Security Council should do in these particularly serious circumstances. Unfortunately, to date the Council remains divided, especially with regard to the unacceptable situation in Aleppo. We think the time has come for the Council at last to take up its responsibilities in the face of the ongoing deteriorating situation on the ground and the continuing tragedy. We therefore once again call on Council members to demonstrate flexibility in order to reach a lasting solution. Of course, we lent our support to the draft resolution aimed at consensus submitted by New Zealand. We believe the draft resolution provides a good basis to work towards giving new impetus to the cessation of hostilities, which would make it possible not only to provide humanitarian assistance, but also to resume the political process, which we believe to be a priority. We also believe it is a priority to fight terrorist groups, especially the Islamic State and the Al-Nusra Front, with full respect for humanitarian law and international humanitarian law.

Lastly, we encourage the talks that took place at Lausanne, which are continuing in Geneva. We renew our call on countries with influence, especially the co-Chairs of International Syria Support Group, to continue their efforts for the soonest possible resumption of intra-Syrian negotiations, with a view to finding a political solution to the crisis on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015).

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

I regret that Ambassador Power left the Chamber. Lately, she has tried to avoid direct polemics with me in public, and I am sorry about that, particularly since I will have to say a few words in response to her attacks on us.

Ambassador Power unfortunately resorted to a method she likes. She distorts Russia's position, presents it in some absurd way and then criticizes her own absurd rendering of that position. I noticed that Mr. O'Brien said not a word in his statement about the fact that for more than seven days now, neither Russia nor the Syrian air force has been bombing Aleppo. She says that we want to be thanked for that. We certainly do not need their thanks, but Secretary of State Kerry talked for weeks about how there had to be seven days with no bombing. It must be a pretty important point if the United States Secretary of State talks about it for weeks. And does it seem a proof of objectivity in a United Nations report (S/2016/873) when that fact goes completely unmentioned in the report? When a United Nations Under-Secretary-General says that bombings occur daily, hourly, and on top of that adds that they are practically dropping chemical weapons on the heads of the citizens of Aleppo, is that a standard of objectivity? Excuse me, that is not objectivity, it is deception.

Turning now to the leaflet that was shown. That is certainly a very controversial fact. These things are showing up everywhere on the Internet, which means that the leaflet was dropped yesterday or today. And even Ambassador Power explained that they were dropping them from Russian and Syrian planes.But our military command says that for the past seven or eight days our planes have not been within 10 kilometres of Aleppo. That must mean that American planes were dropping them, right? Or that the whole thing is a false rumour, of which there are a great many on the Internet, and who knows where else. Presenting such stuff to the Security Council and expecting it to be taken seriously is simply ludicrous. I operate on the belief that we are more serious than that here.

Ambassador Power says that the citizens of eastern Aleppo were not leaving because they are terrified of what awaits them. That is understandable. I completely agree that of course both living in and leaving the city is frightening. We proposed to the United States that our armed forces could be stationed together with American forces on the Castello Road, which could then be freely used both for humanitarian convoys' access to eastern Aleppo and for leaving the city. The United States turned that down. What about that attitude from the humanitarian contingent — "What shall we do? What shall we do?" We said what we could do — have Russian and American soldiers standing together on the Castello Road. No, they said, "You do it". Let the Russians put themselves in danger and be shot at by terrorists? We will not do that. That is just dishonest.

Ambassador Power rightly emphasized the fact — and we have discussed it at times — that the residents of western Aleppo are also under fire. Indeed, 20 people are dying every week, and 50 or 60 are being injured, on top of which they are under severe psychological strain. I am sorry that Samantha Power is not here. A few days ago, in a separate conversation with her, she said that the United States was working on the issue. They are working on it, and nothing is happening. There has been no improvement. That means that their protégés in eastern Aleppo are not doing their bidding, and that they do not know how to stop this horror. Who are they to criticize us and the Syrian Government, who are trying to suppress this breeding ground where terrorists and the other insurgents in eastern Aleppo are endangering its citizens?

Nor should we be talking only about eastern Aleppo when we discuss Syria — and, incidentally, the humanitarian situation, civilian deaths and so forth. A couple of months or more ago, the coalition, supposedly with French planes, made a strike on Manbij in northern Syria. It was reported that more than 100 people died — an entire village was destroyed. Ambassador Power promised that there would be an investigation. We heard nothing. As for what happened there or who did the bombing, we heard nothing. Recently, two Belgian planes, also from the coalition, bombed a Kurdish village. Six people died and some were injured. The Belgians say it was not them. So who was it? Ask the coalition. So why are they so upset about our bombing and say nothing about their own? Not to mention what is going on in Iraq, where there are reports that in just the past few days almost 50 civilians died and 100 people were wounded near Kirkuk. Let us hold a briefing on the situation in Iraq and those bombings in which Mr. O'Brien can undoubtedly give us a demonstration of his oratorical talent.

Just the other day in Yemen, as we all know, 200 people in a funeral procession were killed and 500 more were injured when it was bombed. The British delegation issued a draft statement expressing regret. Regret. They could not even bring themselves to condemn it. When we told them that was not strong enough, they were very happy to abandon the whole thing. Almost 1,000 people killed or injured, and all they have is regret. How about that for standards? Many of us will have to ask forgiveness for sins in Syria, in Iraq and many other situations that we are acquainted with.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt): I speak on behalf of the co-penholders on the humanitarian situation in Syria, namely, Spain, New Zealand and Egypt, and I will deliver my statement in English instead of my national language.

We are deeply concerned by the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation throughout Syria, and in Aleppo in particular, which includes attacks on hospitals, doctors and first responders, as well as on civilian infrastructure. The Security Council has a responsibility to ensure full compliance of any military operations with international humanitarian law, as well as under the provisions of resolution 2286 (2016). We also regret the fact that, despite many endeavours to address the situation, differences between major stakeholders are preventing the Council from guaranteeing the protection of Syrian civilians. Nevertheless, we hoped that there could have been a minimum of understanding to provide a basis for our work, assuming that good could prevail.

As co-penholders, we feel that it is of the utmost importance to shoulder our responsibilities towards the Syrian people as part of a neutral humanitarian approach. We have a collective responsibility to respond to the crisis. Our past failures may constitute an explanation as to why we have not been able to agree on a solution. However, such failure cannot justify a lack of action in the coming days. Therefore we—Spain, New Zealand and Egypt—urge all Council members to set aside their political differences and continue to work on the issue in order to implement the following.

A ceasefire should be established in Aleppo, first and foremost to allow full humanitarian access to the city, as well as an opportunity for sound proposals to be implemented. The duration of the ceasefire should be guided by the assessment of the United Nations on the basis of the actual humanitarian needs on the ground. It would also provide an opportunity to consider steps towards the implementation of Mr. De Mistura's proposals, namely a separation between terrorist organizations and moderate opposition groups, which, as far as we understand, is being studied in Switzerland.

The ceasefire must be observed by all parties. Previous experience has proved that unilateral efforts are not enough. All members of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) should do their utmost

to work with all parties on the ground in that regard. A ceasefire must be fully coordinated with the United Nations in order to ensure that the United Nations and implementing partners can to deliver aid and carry out medical evacuations.

A cessation of hostilities pursuant to resolution 2268 (2016) must be immediately and fully implemented throughout Syria. Aleppo would come under the cessation of hostilities regime at the end of the duration of the ceasefire.

Finally, there has to be adequate and robust monitoring of a ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities within existing mechanisms set forth by resolution 2268 (2016) and the ISSG.

Egypt, New Zealand and Spain will work with members of the Council and do our utmost to reach an agreement on those elements. We would like to end our remarks with a tribute to all the humanitarian workers who risk their lives daily for the sake of the Syrian people

The President (*spoke in Russian*): The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): Given the pressure that you are under to defend the indefensible, Sir, your fantasy world has spread from Syria to Yemen. I just wanted to set the record straight and say that the United Kingdom did circulate a draft Security Council statement on Yemen, but its content was to strongly condemned the attack on the funeral. There was only one Security Council delegation that did not wish to support the statement, and that country was Russia.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now make a further statement in my national capacity as the representative of the Russian Federation.

I thought my colleague's memory was a little better than that. Was three paragraphs all that the event deserved? This is in fact the second version produced in the wake of our comments. But in any case, it was not a serious effort. We can talk about that another time. I hope, finally, that we can use the same format to talk about what is going on in Yemen and Iraq, in a useful discussion. Look, here we have Uruguay, setting a courageous example, always speaking first in public meetings. Let us discuss things. On 31 October, Mr. Ismael Ahmed will be here and we can talk about what is going on in Yemen in a public meeting.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall delay beginning my statement so that certain hypocrites can exit the Chamber. The exit of the representatives of certain States who have shed crocodile tears over the humanitarian situation in Aleppo reveals their hypocrisy and mendacity. They have put on this theatrical show on several occasions, but their behaviour confirms our suspicions of their complete lack of objectivity in their national policies towards my country.

I was compelled to request the floor after I listened to the misguided statements made by a number of Security Council members and the representative of the Secretariat, seeking as usual to distort the strenuous efforts of the Syrian Government to provide necessary services and support to those in need, and to vilify the efforts of my country's Government against organized terrorism being supported by the same States that deny my Government's constitutional and legal rights under international law to defend its people against terrorism represented by the organizations of Da'esh and Jabhat al-Nusra and associated terrorist, who are relics of ignorant times and Wahabi in nature.

As a Government, we will not allow any discussion about something called western Aleppo and eastern Aleppo. We will not allow for a repetition of the sad old scenario in which we used to talk about eastern Beirut and western Beirut. There is one Aleppo and there is one Syria. No one who plots against our country and our territories will achieve anything with us. The blockade is imposed on all of Syria, not just on eastern Aleppo or on Aleppo per se. An unjust blockade is imposed on the entirety of my nation. We have reiterated this thousands of times and shall say it again and again, whether anyone understands or not, and whether anyone refuses to understand or not.

Some States that feigned tears today over Aleppo in a theatrical fashion, as they have done before over the towns of Darayya and the neighbourhood of Al-Waer and other areas, have deliberately ignored the following facts.

First, the representatives of these States ignored the geopolitical landscape of the region, which reflects

the violation of the most basic norms of international law by certain States, such as Turkey, which dreams of restoring its Ottoman glory — which faded and will not return — and repeatedly violates the sovereignty of Syria and Iraq. Another example is Saudi Arabia, which supports terrorism in the region and throughout the world in the name of a religion that is innocent of such claims, including by issuing Wahabi jihadi fatwas legitimizing the bloodshed of Libyans, Yemenis and others.

Similarly, the United States, Britain and France have invaded and destroyed Libya, and before that the United States and Britain invaded and destroyed Iraq and killed millions of its people. The same goes for Qatar, which uses its oil funds to supply terrorists with all sorts of lethal weapons, and Israel, which is forming an alliance with Jabhat al-Nusra in the occupied Syrian Golan area. None of this has bothered Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Ladsous, Mr. Feltman or the Secretary-General. None of these violations of international law have angered anyone at all. It is just business as usual.

Secondly, the representatives who have just exited the Chamber, shirking their responsibilities, have ignored the main reason for the painful deterioration of the situation in Syria in general, and in Aleppo in particular, and how Aleppo has been turned from the economic capital of Syria, whose residents enjoyed a decent standard of living with all services, into a city whose residents suffer in terms of security, health, education and livelihood. What happened in this martyr city is to be blamed on the acts committed by terrorist armed groups and foreign terrorist combatants brought from all over the world — from New Zealand to Canada — into Syria through Turkish territories, facilitated by the Erdogan regime and with funding from the Saudi and Qatari regimes.

As for the Governments of the United States, France, Britain and other States, they ensured them a supply of lethal weapons of all kinds. I bring with me images of the new weapons, including American-made rockets that have been sent to the moderate opposition in eastern Aleppo. These moderate terrorists, who have been genetically modified, are preparing to attack western Aleppo. This is an image of one of the rockets that have been dropped on a Church in western Aleppo; we have thousands of images for anyone who wants to see more.

Thirdly, the representatives who exited the Chamber, shirking their responsibilities to maintain international peace and security, have also ignored the fact that terrorists in eastern Aleppo are using civilians as human shields, as do Da'esh terrorists against the innocent residents of Mosul in Iraq. The terrorists in Mosul are the same as those in eastern Aleppo. They continue to shower the neighbourhoods of western Aleppo with dozens of bombs on a daily basis, claiming thousands of martyrs and wounded, and are met with a dubious international silence, especially from the States whose representatives have left the Chamber. It is deplorable that these States continue to call these terrorists the "moderate arned opposition", in a stark provocation to the provisions of the international law.

Fourthly, the representatives who have left the Chamber, shirking their responsibilities to maintain international peace and security, ignored the reason why the United States-Russia agreement on Aleppo of 9 September did not stand. The Syrian Arab Republic Government committed to the cessation of hostilities, which was exploited by terrorist armed groups to regroup and summon fighters and military equipment from the States that generously shed crocodile tears over the suffering of our people in Aleppo in order to confront the Syrian Government. These States disregarded the fact that armed terrorist groups are responsible for undermining and violating the agreement by rejecting it in the first place. Immediately after the signing of the agreement, 27 terrorist factions declared that they would not honour it — this did not reach the ears of Mr. O'Brien — and were targeting the humanitarian convoy in Oram Al-Kubra.

These States also ignore the fact that the main reason for the collapse of the agreement was the failure of the United States to commit to separating the so-called moderate opposition from the terrorist organizations and its targeting of a military site of the Syrian army in Deir ez-Zor on 17 September. The incident of 17 September allowed the Da'esh terrorists to consolidate their control over 300,000 civilians in Deir ez-Zor.

Fifthly, the representatives who have left the Chamber, shirking their responsibilities to maintain international peace and security, have ignored the agreement reached in the context of the coordinated Syrian-Russian effort for the cessation of hostilities in eastern Aleppo, unilaterally for humanitarian reasons, including the evacuation of the wounded, sick and elderly from eastern Aleppo and the facilitation

of access to a team from the United Nations entities working in Damascus, led by the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the International Red Cross and the Arab Syrian Red Crescent, in order to follow up the evacuation operation and set up six humanitarian corridors to allow civilians to exit, and two checkpoints for armed militants, who were invited to normalize their situation so as to be granted amnesty or to leave the city. However, the terrorist groups that were using the population as human shields undermined that operation. Eight corridors were opened, six for humanitarian exit and two for the armed groups' exit, contrary to what has been said by the American and British representatives.

Sixthly, the representatives who left the Chamber, shirking their responsibilities to maintain international peace and security, avoided identifying the persons responsible for the suffering of the population of Aleppo due to the lack of water, medicine, food and electricity, in particular given the fact that the terrorists cut off the water and power supplies to the city. The water plant is controlled by the terrorists in Aleppo. Everyone should pay attention to this detail. They are the ones who cut off the water supply and who loot food and medicine supplies intended for civilians in Aleppo. They are also responsible, along with the air strikes by the so-called international coalition, for the destruction of the power station in the Suleiman Al-Halabi neighbourhood and elsewhere, as well as other electricity and desalination plants. Therefore, it is the terrorists and the international coalition who are cutting off water and electricity supplies to the residents of Aleppo.

My Government rejects the selective approach of these States concerning the situation in eastern Aleppo and other specific areas in Syria. All of Syria, including Aleppo and the eastern, western, northern and southern areas, suffer from Wahabi terrorism, supported by the regimes of well-known Governments — Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar and Israel foremost among them. It also suffers from the attacks of the allies of these States as part of the so-called international coalition, and from the American unilateral and arbitrary sanctions.

My country's Government reiterates its firm position that the only solution to the crisis is political solution based on an inter-Syrian dialogue, under Syrian leadership, without foreign intervention and without preconditions, be they American, British, French or other. My Government affirms that the political track must go hand in hand with the counter-terrorism track, which will continue unabated until all terrorist armed groups active in Syria have been eliminated. In that context, my Government reiterates the importance of the mission of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General.

How can some of the delegations in this Chamber, representing countries that sponsor terrorism, claim to be fighting terrorism while parroting misleading lies about ongoing military operations carried out by the Syrian Army in Syria and the Russian ally? How can they fight terrorism if they depend on terrorists as sources of information? Is there a relationship between those Governments and the terrorists?

To conclude, the battle for the liberation of Mosul and all territories in Iraq is the battle of the Syrian Government and its army, too. It is an absolute right of the Iraqi Government to liberate Mosul from terrorism, just as it is the right of the Syrian Government to liberate Aleppo from that same terrorism. Iraq and Syria are fighting the same terrorism in Mosul and in Aleppo. The resemblance between the two ongoing military operations in Aleppo and those in Mosul is significant. Why is there support for the military operation in Iraq, while the military operation in Aleppo faces obstruction? Why are humanitarian corridors being opened in order to push Da'esh terrorists out of Mosul towards the Syrian town of Raqqa? And why are those groups leaving Mosul for Raqqa being bombed by the so-called coalition bombers? Why reject the Russian-Syrian proposal to open the same corridors to allow the same terrorists to leave eastern Aleppo? It is as if the States supporting these terrorist groups were saying that the terrorists in Syria are angels, while the same terrorists in other places are devils.

I would have liked to ask the United States representative why her Government did not open a humanitarian corridor for the terrorist who attacked the night club in Florida. Why was he not supplied with food and medicine so that he could continue his terrorist activities, for humanitarian purposes known to Mr. O'Brien? Why were the terrorists who attacked the Bataclan theatre in Paris not supplied by the French Government with food and humanitarian aid and offered a humanitarian corridor to leave Paris for humanitarian reasons as well, known to Mr. O'Biren? The same applies to Britain and elsewhere. I say to those before me: enough hypocrisy. My country's people are the ones paying the price. This theatrical farce must end. All members of the Council must fulfil their responsibility to maintain international peace and

security, rather than settle scores between one another to the detriment of our people in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I give the floor to Mr. O'Brien to respond to the questions and comments made.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to speak again. As an international civil servant acting impartially, I do not retract, qualify or disclaim any fact or part of my earlier statement, which, I can assure you and each and every member of the Council, that I and my team and the wider United Nations have put together with great care, seriousness and professionalism.

I am prompted to state the age-old truth: Do not shoot the messenger. Rather, I urge the Council to stand up for the beleaguered people of Syria and to seize the opportunity that I described of taking leadership and those steps that are available to the Council and which they can take to stop the violence now, to stop the war now.

The United Nations continues its work undeterred. It remains ready to work with all parties to deliver humanitarian assistance, protect civilians and reach people in need. While humanitarians have a particular role, rest assured that we will work as one United Nations, including our support for Staffan de Mistura and his work.

I conclude by simply paying an undiluted tribute and saluting again the brave, undeterred, faithful humanitarian workers in Syria working tirelessly for the people of Syria, who are caught up in this terrible endless crisis and need life support and protection.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I believe that, as President of the Council, I can express the certainty that United Nations humanitarian personnel will continue their difficult work in Syria, as Mr. O'Brien said.

In my national capacity, however, I cannot fail to note that it is clear from Mr. O'Brien's response that he has no information supporting the contention that Russian and Syrian forces have been bombing over the past seven days, just as he has no information that chemical weapons have been used in eastern Aleppo at any point in time. I just want to point that out for the record.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I suggest that after the discussion we have just had there is no need to continue with consultations. We have had a briefing and consultations at the same time.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.